

St. Paul sees big gains from GOP convention

By PAUL SLACK

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Along W. 7th Street in St. Paul, near the Xcel Energy Center, business owners and customers are excited about the Republican National Convention coming to town in September.

Patrick McGovern's Pub is renting its facilities to Anheuser-Busch for private evening events all four days. Manager Jeanne Shydrowski said it's great because the pub wouldn't normally be open for Labor Day, the first of the four-day convention. Dianne Boemer looks forward to having congressmen and other Republican heavy-hitters in the pub she and her husband own. They are still deciding whether to open the pub to the public for lunch during the convention.

Mike DiSanto, owner of Fort Road Florist, says his business is welcoming the visitors to St. Paul and will be open all four days to maximize profits. They are even preparing to undergo remodeling to "spruce the place up a bit."

At the Holiday Inn, directly across the street from the Xcel, Manager Greg Pike says, "We've been booked for months now."

Area residents also see benefits. Between bites of spaghetti and the occasional sip of Diet Coke, two women said that the convention was a bittersweet occurrence. Both are "anti-Republican," but are happy for the boost to the economy. They declined to give their names.

A trio of walkers agreed that the media attention was fantastic for St. Paul, and it would really put the city and Minnesota on the national map.

Officials estimate that 45,000 Republican delegates, journalists and other visitors will be in St. Paul for the convention from Sept. 1-4, spending some \$160 million to \$170 million across the Twin Cities. Those numbers -- and the publicity and media coverage -- excites the mayor of St. Paul.

"Outside the Olympics, there's more coverage of a national convention than any other event," St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman said. "We think long-term, it will help us help other people coming to the city of St. Paul for conventions and various events."

The event won't be without hassles. They include closed streets, traffic congestion and the threat of unruly protesters. But organizers are preparing tight security both to protect Sen. John McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee for president, and other officials, and to ensure that protests are peaceful, according to security consultant Don Peterson, a former St. Paul police officer who advised his former employer on security arrangements.

As a high-profile event, the convention is being referred to as a NSSE (National Special Security Event), which requires a large police presence, said St. Paul Police spokesman Tom Walsh.

St. Paul alone does not have enough law enforcement officers to cover the convention, so departments from around the metro area will be loaning officers to help out. Along with the extra officers, there will be federal law enforcement and Secret Service officers.

People without the proper security clearance will not be allowed within 250 feet of the Xcel, Walsh said. No one involved in the planning of the convention expects any problems, but precautions have been taken to ensure the safety of everyone.

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